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Joint written statement* submitted by the International Youth and Student Movement for the United Nations, non-governmental organization in general consultative status; Union of Arab Jurists, Arab Lawyers Union, Arab Organization for Human Rights, General Arab Women Federation, Indian Movement "Tupaj Amaru", International Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, International Volunteerism Organization for Women, Education and Development - VIDES, Nord-Sud XXI - North-South XXI, Organisation Mondiale des associations pour l'éducation prénatale, Organisation pour la Communication en Afrique et de Promotion de la Cooperation Economique Internationale - OCAPROCE Internationale, United Towns Agency for North-South Cooperation, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status; Indian Council of South America (CISA), International Educational Development, Inc., International Human Rights Association of American Minorities (IHRAAM), World Peace Council, non-governmental organizations on the roster

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The plight of Iraqi women*

Women's rights have always been violated during armed conflict in different ways. Whilst conflict inflicts suffering on everyone, women are particularly affected by its short- and long-term effects. In general they face many challenges in conflict and post-conflict environments – including extreme poverty, displacement from their homes, destruction of social networks, and limited opportunities for employment and income generation.

This report is examining some negative effects of the war and occupation on Iraqi women and their fundamental rights.

Iraqi women before the war and occupation

Since Iraq's independence, women gained important access not only to education, but also health care, employment, political positions and in the economic sphere. Furthermore, women in Iraq made important advances with regards to family rights, the right to serve in the government and their active involvement in political life. During the seventies and eighties of the last century, women's rights in Iraq were the most advanced in the region. By making education compulsory for all by law No. 118 in 1976, the Iraqi government closed the literacy gap between men and women notably and took a great step to eradicate illiteracy and empower women in the working field. The efforts were rewarded when Iraq received the UNESCO award for eradicating illiteracy in 1982. Female literacy reached 87% in 1985 which was by that time far ahead of its neighbouring countries. In 1986, Iraq ratified, as one of the first nation, the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Since the brutal UN sanctions of 1990 and the following Gulf War in 1991, women's rights in Iraq have suffered dramatically. Present-day Iraq is plagued by violence, corruption and injustice, transforming the situation of women into a national crisis.

Women after war and occupation

The US-invasion and occupation of Iraq finally worsened the already during the UN sanctions deteriorating freedom of women.

By dissolving the Iraqi army, police and security units in 2003, the US administration created a security vacuum that resulted in chaos and disorder throughout Iraq. This constructed an environment for criminal groups to move freely and target Iraqi women. However also US forces committed numerous violations against Iraqi women. They were detained, tortured and raped. In most cases it was to use them to pressure their husbands, sons and other relatives to cooperate with the US forces during interrogations.

The lack of responsibility taken on by the occupying powers towards these violations paved the way for more abuses and for to the successive Iraqi governments to continue in the same irresponsible way. Since 2003, and throughout the past decade, fundamental rights of Iraqi women have been constantly neglected and violated.

The US and British officials have defended the occupation regime by promoting its positive effects on women's emancipation. However, when looking at the facts, these claims by the US invasion powers attempt to distract the attention from the deterioration of women's rights under the occupation regime.

Impunity and security

Government forces have targeted women and girls and intimidated them through physical violence, sexual harassment or rape. Several NGOs documented a wave of sexual violence and abductions against women in Baghdad following the invasion.[1] A dramatic increase in sexual assaults and violence against Iraqi women by US forces were visible in Iraq.

[1] Human Rights Watch (2003) http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/07/15/climate-fear-0

Accusations were made against the invading armies of abuses and rapes. Many women were taken hostage, tortured, and sexually abused.[2] One of the most famous crimes in this regard are the Mahmudiya killings, the gang rape and murder of a 14 year old girl by US soldiers in Iraq in March 2006. Militia forces have also been repeatedly accused of rape and sexual abuses, using the environment created by the war.

Insecurity and lack of accountability severely restrict women's personal mobility and consequently their involvement in public life. The continuous deterioration of the justice, police and security system and the immense corruption of the Iraqi government after the invasion led to an absence of women from the streets or obliging them to wear the veil because of the control exercised by armed and extremist groups in several areas.[3] Fear of rape and abduction keeps women in their homes, out of schools and away from work.[4] In 2004-2005, it reached a point where female university students were threatened with being blown up if they continued to study without being segregated from men.[5]

Women in public sphere

According to several Iraqi researchers, the unemployment rate of Iraqi women after the war increased drastically. An Iraqi University professor showed in her survey that at least 85% of educated women are unemployed due to the lack of safe working places provided by the government.[6] The majority of women lost their jobs after the invasion and change in government. Before the invasion, women formed more than 40% of total workers in the public sector however as a consequence of the lack of security in public sphere and the increase in harassment and discrimination of women by police, soldiers and officials as mentioned above, forced women to give up their workplace.

Displaced women in Iraq

Around 4,5 million Iraqis have been displaced inside Iraq since 2003, which is the largest number of displacements in the region since 1948.[7] About 83 percent of this number is made up of women and children. 55% of Iraqi women are displaced and 55% have been subjected to violence.[8] They face strong social stigmas, are highly discriminated and are forced to live in inhumane poor conditions. Since 2003, about 33% of displaced widowed women have not received any humanitarian assistance; 76% of widows do not receive a pension and sometimes are forced to go into temporary marriage with one of the bureaucrats who distribute the funds.[9] Consequentially, the US invasion has led women and girls highly vulnerable to poverty and unemployment.

Sexual exploitation and prostitution

Many Iraqi women have lost their husbands as a result of the armed conflict, generalised violence, and displacement. The resulting financial hardship has made them vulnerable to trafficking for sexual exploitation and prostitution.[10]

As a result of the deteriorating security system driving women into unemployment, sex exploitation of Iraqi women has increased significantly and seems to be the only possibility for many women today to finance their and their children's lives. According to the US' Trafficking in Person Report for 2010 by the Department of State, Iraq is now considered one of "the worst countries" in the world regarding prostitution and sexual exploitation.[11] These are horrifying facts

[2] Global Research (2005) available at http://www.globalresearch.ca/iraqi-women-under-us-occupation/158
[3] CEDAW country report Iraq (2014). Available at http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fIRQ%2f4-6&Lang=en
[4] Human Rights Watch (2014). Available at http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/iraq0214webwcover.pdf
[5] Ibid
[6] Dr. Yasmine Jawad (2013). Available at http://www.gicj.org/iraq_conference_speeches/Dr_Yasmin_Jawad_Presentation.pdf
[7] Dr. Yasmine Jawad (2013). Available at http://www.gicj.org/iraq_conference_speeches/Dr_Yasmin_Jawad_Presentation.pdf
[8] Ibid
[9] Dr. Yasmine Jawad (2013). Available at http://www.gicj.org/iraq_conference_speeches/Dr_Yasmin_Jawad_Presentation.pdf
[10] Human Rights Watch (2013). Available at http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2013/country-chapters/iraq?page=2
[11] The report of the U.S. State on trafficking of human beings (2010). Available at http://www.state gov/documents/organization/142979.pdf

presented by the US, which leaves questions of accountability, responsibility and investigation open to ask. What steps is the invading power taking to ensure punishment and accountability first and second what are the proposed plans of actions and solutions to a better protection of women in Iraq. Women are lured into forced sexual exploitation through false promises of work. Trafficking of young girls is increasingly common to escape poverty. Women are married off into permanent or temporary marriages to find a better life however very often then fall victim to sexual exploitation.[12]

Women in Iraqi prisons and detention facilities

The annual report[13] of the Iraqi Ministry of Human Rights on the situation of prisons and detention centres in Iraq in 2012 indicates that there is a large over-crowding in prisons above its capacity. The same report indicates the cases of allegations of torture and exposure to threats and rape. Sexual abuse as a method of torture against female prisoners is not confined to the notorious Abu Ghraib prison.[14]

In its most recent report of February 2014, Human Rights Watch[15] found that women have been repeatedly subject to rape and sexual assault in Iraqi detention centres. Former detainees reported that their clothing was removed and they were deprived of food and water for days. Additionally, the detention facilities are generally run by men which leaves female detainees vulnerable with regard to their private sphere and increases the risk of sexual harassment and abuses. [16]

Another issue is the lack of specific hygiene needs of women, such as provision of sanitary towels.

Women detained since the end of 2012 told NGOs on the ground that security forces arrested them without showing an arrest warrant, interrogated them about male family members without accusing the women of any crime, and demanded bribes for their release.[17] The majority of women are used as a pressuring tool for their husbands, fathers, brothers or sons. NGOs report that many of these women described were being beaten, kicked, slapped, hung upside-down and beaten on their feet, given electric shocks, and raped or threatened with sexual assault by security forces during their interrogations.[18] Security forces questioned them about their male relatives' activities rather than their own accused crimes and furthermore forced them to sign statements which they were not allowed to read.[19]

The Iraqi criminal justice system tortures women into confessions, using horrendous measures including rape in front of their relatives and children. When finally charged and sentenced, the women are additionally abused, tortured and raped inside the detention facilities. The main issue at hand here is the huge failure by the courts to investigate allegations of abuse and hold the abusers responsible and accountable which encourages police and security forces to falsify confessions and continue the use torture and sexual assault.[20]

One of the main demands during the peaceful mass demonstrations in December 2012 were to set women prisoners free who are subject to abuses and mistreatment inside Iraqi prisons and detention facilities, after the allegations arose that female prisoners are being raped and sexually abused by guards and security forces.

The central concern

[12] Shadow report to CEDAW (2014) available at http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/IRQ/INT_CEDAW_NGO_IRQ_16192_E.pdf
[13] Iraqi Ministry of Human Rights (2012) in Arabic available at http://www.humanrights.gov.iq/uploads/ali%20pdf/final2012.pdf
[14] Ibid
[15] See Human Rights Watch (2014) available at http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/02/06/iraq-security-forces-abusing-women-detention
[16] Shadow report to CEDAW (2014) available at http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/IRQ/INT_CEDAW_NGO_IRQ_16192_E.pdf
[17] Human Rights Watch (2014). Available at http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/iraq0214webwcover.pdf
[18] Human Rights Watch (2014) available at http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/02/06/iraq-security-forces-abusing-women-detention
[19] Ibid
[20] Ibid

The core reason which continuously reinforces the abuse and discrimination of women in Iraq is the corrupt and flawed judicial system which leaves perpetrators of abuses and violence against women unpunished. This circle of impunity and corruption is further abused by the male police force, security forces, prison guards and even judges who use confessions retrieved under torture to sentence the female accused. The deteriorated safety of public life is a further reason why women's rights have worsened horrifyingly.

Furthermore, the destruction of the whole health and education system during the US invasion and occupation left women highly vulnerable to life after the war. The death of many male heads of households as the main breadwinners furthermore pushed women into poverty and prostitution, as explained above.

Women's rights are nothing more than mere words introduced by the US and British occupying forces while the reality of Iraqi women live lives of fear and violence after the invasion.

The NGOs signatories to this statement call on the United Nations in general and the Human Rights Council in particular to:

- **to call on the Special Rapporteur for Violence Against Women to focus in her reports on the cause and consequences of the situation of Iraqi women and investigate all human rights violations and violence against women committed since 2003**
- **request the High Commissioner to present to the Council a detailed report on the Human Rights violations in Iraq since 2003 according to reports and documentation by UNAMI and civil society**
- **appoint a UN Special Rapporteur for the human rights situation in Iraq**
- **ensure that all human rights violations in Iraq during the sanctions and the invasion and occupation are investigated by an international independent body and that perpetrators are held accountable**
- **ensure that all measures are taken to end the current state of impunity, both within Iraq and with regards to the culpability of the occupying powers**

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* BRussels Tribunal, Arab Lawyers Association- UK, Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ), Association of Humanitarian Lawyers (AHL), The International League of Iraqi Academics (ILIA), The Iraqi Commission on Human Rights (ICHR), Women Will Association (WWA), Organization for Widows and Orphans (OWO), Ikraam Center for Human Rights, Belgian Peace Movement, Ligue camerounaise des droits de l'homme, Monitoring Net of Human Rights in Iraq (MHRI), Women Solidarity for an Independent and Unified Iraq, Alliance to Renew Co-operation among Humankind, International Coalition against War Criminals (ICAWC), Medical Aid for the Third World, Association of Iraqi Diplomats (AID), The African Association of Human Rights (AAHR), Protection of Human Rights Defenders in the Arab World, Moroccan Association for the Right to a Fair Trial, Americans Against the War (France), General Federation of Iraqi Women (GFIW), The International Action Center (IAC), American Worker, Association of Iraqi Intellectuals and Academics, The International Network of Arab Human Rights NGOs, America In Solidarity, Federacion De Mujeres Cubanas, Association of Victims of American Occupation Prisons, International Anti-Occupation Network (IAON), International Lawyers.org, International Society of Iraqi Scientists, The Perdana Global Peace Foundation, Kuala Lumpur Foundation to Criminalise War, Spanish Campaign against the Occupation and for Iraq Sovereignty- CEOSI, Arab Cause Solidarity Committee, Iraq Solidarity Association in Stockholm, El Taller International, World Courts of Women, Center for Development Studies- India, Wariscrime.org, Action Center for Justice, 1% A Peace Army.org, A Bigger Tent.org, Agir contre la guerre (France), American Voices Abroad (Berlin, Germany), American Voices Abroad Military Project (Europe), Anti War Fair, Arizona Christian Peacemakers, Armbands for Peace, Arms Against War, Artists Against the War, Backbone Campaign, Be the Change, Become Active, Bike for Peace (Germany), Bill of Rights Defense Committee, Bird Dogger Org., Children of Iraq Association (UK),Bloomington Peace Action Coalition (IN), Blue State News Only, Boston Mobilization, Bring Democracy Back, Bring Them Home,Butterfly Gardeners Association, Citizens for Accountability on Iraq, California for Democracy, Camp Casey Blog, Camp U.S. Strike for Peace Campaign, Campaign Against Sanctions and Military Intervention in Iran, Canada Watch, Carolina Peace Resource Center (SC), Cartoon Free America, Catalysts of Hope, Central Colorado Coalition on the Iraq War, Chester County Peace Movement (PA), Cindy Sheehan Org., Cities for Peace, Citizens for Legitimate Government, Citizens for Peace & Justice, Human Rights for all-Morocco, Christian Clergy For

Impeachment.com, Clothing of the American Mind, Coalition Against Election Fraud, Coalition for Impeachment Now (COIN), Code Pink, the Iraqi Association for Human Rights (IAHR), Al-Basa'er Media Association, Consumers for Peace.org, Dhafir Trial.org, DC Anti-War Network.org, Democracy Action, Democracy for America Meetup (Birmingham, AL), Olympia Citizens' Movement to Impeach Bush/Cheney (WA), One Million Reasons, Operation Cease Fire, Operation Impeachment, Orange County Grassroots (CA), Out of Iraq, Out of Iraq Bloggers Caucus, Patrick Henry Democratic Club, Patriotic Pulse, Patriots for Gore, Peace Action, Peace Action Wisconsin, Peace and Accountability, Peace Drum, Peace Majority, Peace Movement Aotearoa (New Zealand), Peace Reso.org, Peninsula Peace and Justice Center (Palo Alto, CA), People's Campaign for the Constitution, People Powered Impeachment, People's Email Network, People's Glorious Five Year Plan, Picnic to Impeach, Pixel4Peace.org, Playing in Traffic, PledgeToImpeach.org, Political Cooperative, Politics and Art, Progressive Action Alliance, Progressive Action Center, Progressive Avenues, Progressive Democrats of America, Progressive Democrats of Hawaii Project Filibuster, Project for the OLD American Century, Refusing to Kill.org, Rescue Our Democracy, Sacramento for Democracy (CA), St Pete for Peace (FL), Sampsonia Way, San Diego for Democracy, School of the Americas Watch, Sheehan for Congress, South Florida Impeachment Coalition, South Mountain Peace Action (Maplewood & South Orange, NJ), Springs Action Alliance (CO), Stop the War Coalition (UK), Students for Impeachment, Students Towards a New Direction (STAND), Summit County Progressive Democrats (OH), The Known UnKnowns, The Politically Incorrect Cabaret, The Rational Response Squad, Think Blue Dems, Time for Accountability, Toronto Coalition to Stop the War (Canada), Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition International, True Blue Liberal.org, Trumansburg Impeachment (NY), Truth Empowered, Truthtelling Project, UC Nuclear, Underground Action Alliance, Unitarian Universalist Peace and Justice Group (Nantucket, MA), United Blue USA, United for Veterans (Wayne, MI), United Progressives, Upbeat Defiance, US Peace Memorial, US Tour of Duty: Iraq Veterans and Military Families Demand the Truth, Velvet Revolution, Vet Gulf March, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, Veterans for Peace, Chapter 27, Virginia Grassroots Coalition, Voters for Peace, We the People for Peace, We the People Network, We the People Now, We The People United Bangladesh.org, Peace Surge, Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane (WA), Stop the War (UK), U.S. Peace Council, World Can't Wait.org, World Prout Assembly, Komite Internazionalista- Basque, Asociación Paz, Igualdad y Solidaridad Internacional, Arab Cause Solidarity Committee, Iraq Solidarity Association in Stockholm, Málaga, Spain, Stop Fascism Action Network, The Asian Jurists Centre, Association of Human Rights Defenders in Iraq (AHRDI), The African Center for Human Rights (ACHR), Veterans for Peace, Your Declaration of Independence.org , Arab Lawyers Network-UK, Conservative Centre of Environmental & Reserves in Fallujah (CCERF), Willie Nelson Peace Research Institute, Studies Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, The Iraqi Centre for Human Rights, Association internationale des droits de l'homme, NGOs without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.